

**TOWN OF ROCKY HILL  
SENIOR AFFAIRS COMMITTEE  
MEETING OF DECEMBER 15, 2014**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas called the December 15, 2014 Senior Affairs Committee meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. in the Town Council Chambers, Rocky Hill Town Hall, 761 Old Main Street, Rocky Hill, CT.

Those in attendance: Councilor Joe Kochanek, Councilor Frank Szeps, Denise Sanderson (Elderly Services Coordinator/Municipal Agent) and Cathy Sylvester (Senior Coordinator/Recreation Supervisor). Also present: Town Manager Guy Scaife, Lisa Zerio (Director of Parks and Recreation & Custodial Services) and Various Seniors of R.H.

Chairwoman Vargas said Town Manager Scaife had prepared quite an extensive presentation with regards to the programs, as well as the use of the Town buildings, to see what space is available. Town Manager Scaife had been asked to do this at this Committee's meeting in October.

**Councilor Kochanek made a motion to move Item # 3 (Approval of Minutes – October's Meeting) on this meeting's agenda to make that Item # 2 instead of Public Comment and then move Item # 4 (Updates from Town Manager – facilities) so that becomes Item # 3. Public Comment will become Item # 4. The motion was seconded by Councilor Szeps and adopted unanimously.**

**2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – OCTOBER'S MEETING**

**Councilor Szeps made a motion to approve the October 20, 2014 Minutes of the Senior Affairs Committee meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilor Kochanek and adopted unanimously.**

**3. UPDATES FROM TOWN MANAGER - FACILITIES**

Town Manager Scaife did a PowerPoint presentation. After the presentation, Town Manager Scaife asked if anyone had any questions. Chuck Robison, 54 Pratt Street, R.H., asked if there would be a handout of this presentation. Town Manager Scaife said he had a few copies of this tonight and this will also be posted on the Town's website tomorrow. This will also be a part of these Minutes. (Please see the attachment.)

Toni Palazzolo asked if something is discovered, like more senior housing possibly of a different income level, if it will be put in the ten year plan. Town Manager Scaife thinks that is a

challenging question and he thinks it is a great point. The ten year plan is really a vision though and not the specifics necessarily. He thinks this could be addressed overall but they are not at a point where they can have any specificity on this.

Bernadette Pietraroia said Simsbury is developing a Senior Center, which will have a Community Senior Center on the first floor. There will be senior housing on the second and third floor of this. She is wondering if this can be considered as an alternative instead of a standalone building of which they might not get sufficient grants for it. They might get more grant money possibly if housing is attached to a Senior Center. Town Manager Scaife thinks they have to keep an open mind at this point. He is confident that the data they have is correct. Fifty-four percent of Rocky Hill's Community Center is used by seniors today. They will have a 12,000 square foot facility that will be in half utilization if the seniors move out of it but the fixed cost would be pretty constant. They also wouldn't have the convenience of the Cora J. Belden Library and the Human Services' building, etc. He thinks they have to go into a lot more depth to understand what the needs are. Approximately 30% of the Town's population, or 6,000 residents, are seniors and he mentioned about trying to determine what percentage of those actually want to use the services, as well as the "elasticity" of the tax bill because there are other needs as well. They have a lot of work ahead of them.

Marilyn Swepson, Quail Drive, R.H., asked what budget the moving of the walls in other offices is coming out of. Town Manager Scaife said some money is always put aside in the Town's operating budget for facilities work and this isn't from any monies that have been set aside for senior programs.

Rich Laria told Town Manager Scaife that he had said that 56% of the \$600,000 budget for the Human Services Department is for the seniors and 44% of that is for non-seniors. Rich Laria asked Town Manager Scaife if it is possible for him to do this for the \$2.5 million dollar budget for Parks and Recreation. Town Manager Scaife said they will try to come up with that but the challenge for that department is it is so big and complicated so he didn't want to give them a number that he isn't comfortable with. This is why they had migrated back to looking at the floor space and how the facility is used. Rich Laria thinks it is important for them to understand what senior services come under Parks and Recreation.

Karen Plaza, Gilbert Avenue, R.H., said that 12,000 square feet sounds like it is a lot of space but an average home in Rocky Hill equates to approximately 2,000 square feet so this would equate to only six homes that they would be looking at for space. Also, this Town is looking into bringing in good development, etc. She thinks they would be very embarrassed today if they were to show a developer their Senior Center because it isn't sufficient for the space that is required.

John Bedlack said he was born and raised in Rocky Hill and his children were too. He told Town Manager Scaife that his presentation was quite interesting but he might debate some of his scientific methods with regards to him going into the Cora J. Belden Library and looking around (to see approximately how many seniors, etc. were there). John Bedlack said they have to keep in mind that the senior population is growing. He then referred to how Town Manager Scaife had mentioned that he is going to get similar size Towns like Rocky Hill in order to gather

information but he thinks that is an error because Rocky Hill likes to compare itself to more progressive Towns (Wethersfield and Newington, etc.), especially with regards to schools. John Bedlack doesn't think that justice will be done if only Towns that are the size of Rocky Hill are looked at. He also told Town Manager Scaife that he had spent a lot of time on programs and not on facilities but he thinks some of his senior neighbors' hearts are on the facilities because they would like a place to go hang around. John Bedlack told Town Manager Scaife that it would be very interesting if he does the same analysis on all of the programs that are offered in this Town with the facilities as to how much it is costing the Town for programs for people who are eighteen years old and younger. John Bedlack would like to see if people who are eighteen years old and younger make up one-third of Rocky Hill's population like the seniors do or if it would be less than that because a lot of money is being spent on them. He told Town Manager Scaife that he did a good job but he thinks they need to see where Rocky Hill is spending their money.

Bernadette Pietraroia thought John Bedlack made a very valid point about how it looks like the seniors are getting all of these services according to the information that was presented so they should be quiet and happy but she said they should look to see what services the youth are getting. Bernadette Pietraroia referred to how Town Manager Scaife had mentioned the trails in Town that they can use but she said people who have walkers and wheelchairs, etc. can't use those. Bernadette Pietraroia then referred to their current facility for the seniors and she said they aren't able to accommodate everyone at lunch. There is a waiting list. She also referred to the gym there but she said the seniors don't have the use of that at all. She then told Town Manager Scaife that he needs to consider how the space in the Community Center will be used if the seniors leave but she said that shouldn't preclude them from moving on or they shouldn't be penalized for this because she is sure that uses can be found for it. Bernadette Pietraroia then asked if the youth have a lot of activities available to them in the Community Center and she said probably not. She also said a very limited number of senior men come to the Community Center because there is nothing for them to do. Wethersfield has nine activities that include men that Rocky Hill doesn't have and Plainville has twelve activities. It is healthy and necessary for men for them to stay active. She told Town Manager Scaife that she hopes he will consider their needs and not just that they have a lot. Town Manager Scaife said he hopes his comments aren't being interpreted by them that they should be happy with what they have. He is trying to do an inventory. He has been taken aback by letters and comments of individuals who almost were stating that they have nothing and there are no adequate facilities. He doesn't think that is a fair position. They have to start somewhere. An inventory seems like a logical approach but he told them that he will be glad to go about this a different way if there is a different approach. There are desires and needs but there is also an economic reality so they also need to think about how this will be paid for and who will pay for this. Mayor Vassel has pushed hard with regards to coming up with more ways to reduce taxes for the seniors and Town Manager Scaife said he probably has heard that from him at least six times. Town Manager Scaife told them again that they are at the beginning and he welcomes the feedback, as well as any ideas, that can be given to Cathy Sylvester and Denise Sanderson. Town Manager Scaife said he will at least give an update in February 2015.

Rita Thibodeau, 8D Carillon Drive, R.H., said the lunchroom is used for lunch, as well as for them to play bingo, etc. in there at the same tables and she is concerned about how sanitary that

is. The tables are also in very bad shape and the chairs are terrible. She said they need to at least get new supplies for the dining room if they can't have a new facility.

Barbara Robison, 54 Pratt Street, R.H. said there are different age groups for seniors (older and younger). Wethersfield has a very small gym room for seniors. Socialization is also necessary for so many people who have lost their spouses, etc. Younger seniors will also be looking for different kinds of activities which aren't available and rooms also aren't available. She questioned like someone else had as to whether people will want to move into Rocky Hill if there is nothing for them to do. Town Manager Scaife said the difference in the age brackets is a really good point and that is a challenge. He thanked Barbara Robison for bringing this up because he had meant to mention it. Town Manager Scaife said this adds a significant degree of complexity to this.

Melodie Perretto, 148 Raymond Road, R.H., said the seniors wanted to thank this Committee for this evening's meeting and for allowing this discussion. She thanked Town Manager Scaife for his presentation because she said that the seniors didn't know he was going to do that. Melodie Perretto said they had been concerned after this Committee's last meeting and hopefully they will get a direction for their next steps as to where they are going to go with regards to the seniors. The real needs of this community are being driven by the population of the senior growth. The Feasibility Study will be up to the Town Council and to Town Manager Scaife down the road. Melodie Perretto asked Town Manager Scaife in the future if he could explain what this is and what it will entail, as well as the process. Melodie Perretto said services and needs are a priority of the community. Progress is keeping up with the times and being current so that when the time comes, they are in the right spot. She guesses that this is also seeing what they have for activities now. She thinks they will get something eventually but the question is how they will go about this because it is a big issue. She is very happy that they are getting more parking spaces. The lunches are another problem because they can only serve so many people. She referred to the capacity of the lunchroom but that amount can't be put in that room because some people use walkers, etc. They need to either expand this building for the future if possible or get another one and she knows this will cost money. Seniors don't want taxes to go up but they have to realize that they will still go up even if they don't get anything because of roads being fixed, etc. or otherwise they won't have these services.

Chairwoman Vargas said they were able to have an hour long meeting this evening instead of a half hour long one because normally there would have been an Open Space Land Acquisition & Farmland Preservation meeting at 5:30 p.m. but there wasn't one tonight. There is going to be another meeting at 6:00 p.m. She thanked Town Manager Scaife because he had been given the charge for this at this Committee's meeting in October. Chairwoman Vargas noticed though that no one had mentioned the survey results. The survey brought to her attention that a lot of people in Rocky Hill don't know that there are senior services. She told the Staff for them to probably do a little more advertising in order to get the word out. One hundred and eighty-three people returning the survey doesn't warrant for them to go to the Town Council with regards to having a referendum. There should have been a lot more surveys returned.

Chairwoman Vargas also asked the Staff to maybe be a little more creative with regards to the events. She referred to what had been mentioned about there being nothing for senior men to do

and she said Staff should be reporting this up through the lines to Town Manager Scaife so that they (Town Council) can be told that more male activities are needed. Chairwoman Vargas said the only way this can be handled is through the budget and the tables would be handled this way too. She is very happy that everyone was able to give their input during this hour. She doesn't think that they will be having a meeting in January 2015 because Town Manager Scaife had said that he would be coming in front of this Committee in February 2015.

Chairwoman Vargas said that she had talked with Lisa Zerio because she wanted to know how all of the services from Parks and Recreation, Human Services and the Cora J. Belden Library overlap. Chairwoman Vargas said the Town is paying through the budget process for services to be provided in all of those departments. She would like to see how this all works and she would like to make the senior population aware of this so she thinks this will be presented during the budget process. This information will be shared with everyone as soon as they get it. She told everyone that they are listening to everything and that this is a process of which she thought Town Manager Scaife did an excellent job explaining. Chairwoman Vargas said they have to give Town Manager Scaife a little bit of time, etc. and this will hopefully go in the right direction.

**4. PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no additional public comment.

**5. OTHER**

Nothing else was discussed.

**6. ADJOURNMENT**

**Councilor Szeps made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:00 p.m. The motion was seconded by Councilor Kochanek and adopted unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Jo-Anne Booth  
Recording Secretary